

The Maoists

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THE RECENT HYSTERICAL outbursts about Maoism in Ireland suggest that an influential and large group of Chinese Communists are on the brink of a power take-over leading to this country's ensnarement inside the bamboo enclave. A cooler appraisal of the strength of Maoism here suggests a less optimistic or pessimistic (depending on your viewpoint) situation.

In 1966 a group called the Internationalists was formed in Trinity College to promote study of international affairs. This group was patronised by Kadar Asmal and Owen Sheehy Skeffington- and the political complexion was left-wing liberal. Shortly afterwards however it was taken over by a number of students of Maoist tendencies and later became completely dominated by them. Its leading light was a brilliant Indian academic, Hardial Bains, who has since gone to spread the gospel in Montreal.

Maoism caught on fairly easily in Trinity. Its popularity as an ideology of the Left was unrivalled in the university as orthodox communism was discredited in the eyes of students and the rival 'New Left' group, the Socialist Society, was split between different Trotskyist factions and various other ideologies. Furthermore it had a coherent, watertight ideology which appealed to students who often turned to the left because of personal confusion and stress in the highly competitive university. Very soon the Internationalists developed the present Maoist form of organisation. They lived communally, shared all their earnings, rose at a certain time for pre-breakfast study sessions, and often worked an 18 hour day bill-posting around the city or stapling magazines.

Trinity Scuffles

In the summer of 1968 they burst upon the public consciousness when they protested against the visit to Trinity of King Baudoin of Belgium. There went some minor scuffles with the Gardai and right-wing students which attracted scare newspaper headlines and silly editorial condemnation of students in general by the Sunday Independent and the Evening Herald. In 1968 they opened a bookshop in Townsend Street in Dublin. This attracted a small number of young people of working class background, most of whom were in school. They formed the People's Rights group and published an agitational broadsheet of the same name. The group, however, was hindered by the continued political -domination of the Trinity students. Such people as Peter Semper and Nick Millar, both intelligent but unimaginative English students, exerted complete control over the decisions of the People's Rights Committee in the name of political leadership.

The bookshop closed late last year when the lease ran out; since then the Maoists have opened another bookshop in Exchequer St. The People's Rights Committee, along with the Maoist students, provided the basis for the setting up last October of the Irish Communist Movement (Marxist-Leninist), the major Maoist grouping at the present. Maoism soon spread to other Irish centres. Many of their Trinity students began to drop out of the university. This was for a variety of reasons: some found it impossible to complete their studies while remaining convinced Maoists and consequently "joined the working class", others were ordered to leave the university by the group. Of these people some went to industrial centres in other parts of Ireland such as the Shannon Industrial Estate, others joined Maoist groups in Britain and Canada, while a few attempted to organise small farmers in the west of Ireland. All the Maoists went on periodic "Learn from the People" campaigns when they canvassed the general population in various parts of the country.

Militant Forays

In the last six months or so the Maoists have become more activist. Having satisfied themselves that their politically educative work was complete, they have engaged in a series of confrontations in the universities and elsewhere. A long-drawn out campaign to have Anne-Marie McCall's examination papers released for public discussion (she was failed for political reasons, the Maoists claim) drew little support from students in either T.C.D. or U.C.D.

The only consequence of the campaign was that one of the Maoists' leading ideologues, David Vipond, was suspended from Trinity for a year, for assaulting Professor Wilson of the Pharmacology Department.

Their "Smash U.S. Imperialism Week" (organised to coincide with the visit of Ted Kennedy to Trinity) was highlighted when 100 or so of their members and supporters from all over Ireland endeavoured unsuccessfully to block Kennedy's car.

At the present time they are organising around three issues (1) the suspension of Fintan Cronin from U.C.D. for allegedly assaulting the College Registrar, Professor Murphy (2) The fines recently imposed on two Maoists after they were arrested at the Easter Commemoration Parade, when selling their literature (3) The beating up of an ex-Trinity Maoist, Koye Majekodumni, by the police in a protest demonstration in Canada. They produce quite a number of periodicals and magazines, all run off at their printing press in a flat in Wicklow St. (the machine was purchased through the savings of the members over a number of years). These include: "Red Patriot", "Progressive Worker", "Limerick-Shannon People's Rights", "Irish Student", and "Literature and Ideology".

How Many Maoists?

There are quite a few Maoists in Ireland now. In Trinity College there are about 15, in U.C.D. about 8. In U.C.C. there are only 4 or so, while in Galway University there are about 5. In Limerick there are around 6 while in Dublin outside the university there are possibly another 10 to 15.

This numbers in all about 50 Maoists.

In addition to this there are numerous camp followers in the universities. Various dilettante socialists follow the Maoists because they feel they are the "authentic" socialists. Other students follow them but do not join either because they are not allowed to or because they are unwilling to commit themselves wholly to the group. This might bring the total of

Maoists in the country up to about 70-80. They remain nevertheless a static group. Their ideology never progresses, they remain dominated by Trinity students such as David Vipond and Carol Reekes, and they constantly lose a large proportion of their members,

Ireland's Maoists

The Irish Maoists have little or nothing to do with China either diplomatically or ideologically. China no doubt is hardly aware of their existence. A leading Irish Maoist, Peter Semper, once wrote to the *Peking Daily* which printed his letter but pointed out that he was hopelessly ideologically incorrect. Another time the Trinity Maoists sent a photo of Semper arguing with Professor Dawson captioned "Staunch student exposes reactionary academic" to *Peking Pictorial*. But it refused to publish it so the Trinity Maoists inserted it into the next issue and pretended that it had been published in China. Maoist groups are probably an embarrassment to China. In England for instance, there are 6 warring Maoist groups all claiming to be wholly correct and to have an imprimatur from China. Last year the Chinese Embassy in London sent an invitation to a reception to 4 of the 6 groups and the other 2 in anger immediately denounced Mao "as a tool of revisionism" and began supporting his enemy Liu Shao Shi. Undoubtedly such antics are embarrassing for Chinese diplomats.

Ideologically the Maoists over here have almost as little to do with China. They repeat Mao's prescription for a successful revolution but ignore the fact that they are in a different country. For instance when Mao called for an alliance between peasants and workers, the Irish Maoists interpreted this as meaning that small farmers in the Gaeltacht were 'a progressive class' and all trooped off there one Summer to tell them the good news about Mao. Irish Maoists also interpret the rapid success of Mao in China as applicable to Ireland. They ardently believe that very shortly they will assume the leadership in Ireland, that their every word has the Imperialists quaking, just as in China. The Maoists in Ireland prove that a political language when transposed out of one situation into another can be meaningless.

Divisive Role

Sociologically the student Maoists are explicable as an altogether extreme reaction by young idealists to a society that has not solved the problems that beset its people. That young people can take up with such conviction a philosophy that bears little relation to their own experience, or indeed to Irish experience generally, indicates precisely the extraordinary lack of faith among the younger generation in the norms and values of contemporary Western society.

On the political level the Maoists cannot hope to succeed in Ireland. Their social origins will necessarily make the working class antagonistic towards them. To a large extent they ignore ordinary working class issues except for the Anti- Cheap Labour League in Limerick-and concentrate on student problems and gripes. Furthermore their allegiance to China is expressed in the form of pietistic regurgitation of Chinese literature and exaggerated claims of internal struggles in the Chinese Communist party.

Anyone who understands the Irish working class knows that the Maoists are not a threat to the status quo in Ireland. They are however a threat to the radical left in that they discredit socialism in the eyes of the ordinary people and are a constant source of ammunition for professional scare-mongers in Ireland.